

## Pilot program has lowered parking rates and increased revenue

November 5, 2009

By KEVIN FAULCONER



In just five years, the Downtown Parking Management Group (DPMG) has managed to lower metered rates and increase revenue without wading through a sea of bureaucratic red tape. More local control and less government has led to dramatically positive results, and I believe it's time for the City to expand on this successful formula.

The group — made up of downtown residents, business owners and community leaders — was formed in 2004 and given the authority to alter parking meter rates and hours of operation in certain areas of downtown.

What DPMG members quickly learned, after working with a consultant, is that many of the meters in the pilot area were underutilized. Industry experts say 85 percent of metered spaces should be occupied throughout the day.

On streets with low meter usage, the DPMG reduced the City's standard hourly rate, \$1.25, to as low as 50 cents in some places. It also extended the maximum parking limit — up to 9 hours in certain areas. The result: A 106 percent increase in utilization, and an 89 percent increase in parking meter revenues between 2005 and 2007.

By lowering meter rates and extending limits, the City brought in more parking meter revenue. This is an important point, obviously. And it couldn't have happened any other way because the DPMG does not have the authority to raise rates.

Mayor Jerry Sanders will soon bring his Parking Meter Utilization Plan to the City Council. The goal of that plan is threefold: Increase community control over parking meter rates and hours of operation, better utilize metered spaces and streamline the process to remove politics and bureaucracy.

Similar to the pilot zone governed by DPMG, the mayor's plan would give established neighborhood parking groups the authority to alter times and rates in order to maximize parking usage.

Changes could be appealed to the City Council, but neither the mayor nor the City Council would have the authority to increase rates.

San Diego's meters currently cost parkers \$1.25 an hour from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Saturday — everywhere in the City outside of the downtown pilot area.

Under the mayor's plan, rates in certain areas could increase to \$2.50 an hour and enforcement could be extended to 11 p.m., but nothing would change without the approval of local parking groups, and rates would likely decrease in most places.

The mayor's plan is expected to come before council before the end of the year. It's an issue I've monitored closely because downtown is home to the highest concentration of metered parking spaces.

Community members are the ones who should be deciding what works best for downtown residents, businesses and tourists. It's one of the reasons why I've been such a strong advocate of DPMG.

The Mayor's plan would set parameters. It could not be used to increase meter rates or extend hours of operations without community input.

You cannot argue with the results of the DPMG. Building upon its success, we now have an opportunity to expand the pilot program across San Diego.

*Kevin Faulconer is a San Diego City Council member representing District 2, which includes downtown, Little Italy, Old Town, Bankers Hill and Mission Hills.*